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UNCLAS LILONGWE 000761

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/S

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ANNOUNCES NEW US AMBASSADOR AND OTHER APPOINTMENTS

Classified By: Political Officer Tyler Sparks for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (SBU) On Monday, September 5, President Mutharika announced a number of new diplomatic appointments in the Malawian Foreign Service. Topping the list is the appointment of Francis Moto, former Principal at Chancellor College, as Ambassador to the U.S. This is the first that the Embassy has heard of the appointment, which will still have to be approved by Parliament.

2. (SBU) Moto has been at the center of controversy the past six months centering on Chancellor College, the major University in Malawi. The President, who holds the title of Chancellor of Chancellor College, met with students last week to discuss various grievances, including an extended faculty strike. At that meeting Mutharika announced that Moto would be removed from his position. The appointment as Ambassador appears to be a way to quietly sideline him.

3. (SBU) Another prominent appointment is the naming of Agrina Mussa as new Ambassador to the U.K. Mussa is the head of Malawi's Chamber of Commerce and the former Chair of Electricity Supply Corporation of Malawi (ESCOM), the electricity parastatal corporation. She is also the wife of Minister of Transport and Public Works Henry Mussa. Agrina Mussa had recently been at the center of a scandal surrounding the contract awarding process at the ESCOM.

4. (U) Other appointments include the naming of long-time Clerk of Parliament Roosevelt Gondwe as Ambassador to Japan; former Nairobi High Commissioner Benson Tembo as HC in Harare; Sam Kandodo Banda, the former head of the Movement for Genuine Democratic Change (MGODE) political party, as HC in Maputo; and Professor Richard Phoya, older brother to Minister of Justice Henry Phoya, as HC in Dar-es-Salaam.

5. (SBU) Comment: Mutharika seems to be both sidelining problem cases (Moto, Mussa), while rewarding supporters (Banda, Phoya). In either case, he has certainly moved further away from his stated desire to promote qualified career diplomats. All appointments will still have to be confirmed by Parliament's Public Appointments and Declaration of Assets Committee. (End Comment)

EASTHAM